WHAT IF WE TEAR THE WALL DOWN?
Empowered owners, mutant houses and the twilight of confined architecture

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As long as it does not affect others – as in the public space or in society’s self-imposed rules – an owner is free to do whatever he wants within his property. Architecture does not always contemplate that kind of freedom, to the point that it could go against its own values. The survey of the changes made to a house by Luciano Kulczewski allows observing how freedom to intervene operates indifferent to architecture.

What would Luciano Kulczewski say if he saw how the house he designed in 1930 for Ana Castañón was transformed over the years (mutations that are illustrated in the following pages)? What would many architects say if they could go back to the houses they once imagined, designed, and assessed their faithful transfer from drawings to building?

The trajectory of disciplinary-originated residential architecture has rested on the notion of authored work – a work designed and built from scratch from plans and sections. Paradoxically, while the uncertain
Luciano Kulczewski,
Casa Castañón, Ñuñoa, 1930.
Plano ingreso municipal / Original floorplan
Dibujo / Drawing: Simón Morgado

Dibujos y levantamiento del caso estudio
Simón Morgado

Planta nivel 1 / Plan level 1
E. / S. 1:200

Planta nivel 2 / Plan level 2
E. / S. 1:200
Luciano Kulczewski, Casa Castañón, Ñuñoa, 1930.
Mutaciones – Intervención / Mutations – Intervention
Dibujo / Drawing: Simón Morgado

Planta nivel 1 / Plan level 2
E. / S. 1:200

Planta nivel 1 / Plan level 1
E. / S. 1:200
1. Colocación de parra sobre estructura de madera en patio, c. 1960 / Placement of grapevine on wooden structure in the yard, c. 1960
2. Protección de medianeros con vidrio picado, c. 1960 / Dividing walls’ protection made out of broken glasses, c. 1960
3. Ampliación ochavo esquina del terreno, c. 1960 / Extension of the plot’s corner, c. 1960
4. Modificación de artefactos de gas y lavaplatos de cocina, c. 1990 / Modification of gas appliances and kitchen dishwasher, c. 1990
7. Techado y cierre de terraza segundo nivel para habilitación de espacio de trabajo, 2002 / Roofing and enclosing of second-level terrace for workspace, 2002
8. Cambio de superficie de piso del espacio de trabajo por cerámica, 2002 / Change the workspace’s floors to ceramic, 2002
9. Cambio de superficie en baño principal por porcelanato, 2002 / Change of main bathroom’s floors to porcelain stoneware, 2002
10. Cambio en material de marco de ventanas, madera por aluminio, 2002 / Change in window frame material, from wood to aluminum, 2002
11. Instalación de barras de seguridad en ventanas, 2006 / Installation of security bars in windows, 2006
12. Construcción de baño en primer piso, 2006 / Bathroom construction on first floor, 2006
13. Habilitación de acceso vehicular oriente, 2008 / Opening of east vehicular access, 2008
14. Cambio de superficie exterior en acceso por piedra pizarra, 2008 / Change of access exterior surface to slate stone, 2008
15. Cambio de superficie piso segundo nivel par alfombra, 2008 / Second level floor change to carpet, 2008
17. Cambio de superficie exterior casa por pastelones, 2008 / Exterior surface change to flagstones, 2008
22. Remodelación general de baño 1er nivel (artefactos y terminaciones) 2008 / General remodeling of first level bathroom (artifacts and finishing) 2008
23. Construcción de radier en patio acceso principal, 2008 / Slab construction in main access yard, 2008
24. Remodelación general de baño segundo nivel (artefactos y revestimientos) 2008 / General remodeling of second level bathroom (artifacts and finishing) 2008
25. Remodelación de artefactos y muebles de cocina, 2008 / Remodeling of kitchen artifacts and furniture, 2008
27. Habilitación de logia e instalación de calefont, interior de bodega norte, 2010 / Loggia opening and water heater installation, north warehouse interior, 2010
28. Instalación de lavadero en logia, 2010 / Opening of loggia laundry, 2010
29. Construcción de bodega oriente para objetos y vehículos pequeños, 2010 / Construction of east warehouse for objects and small vehicles, 2010
30. Cierre de sector bodega oriente de patio acceso principal, 2010 / Closure of east warehouse area at main access patio, 2010
31. Revestimiento de fachada con estuco granulado, 2010 / Façade covering with granulated stucco, 2010
32. Construcción de baño dentro de bodega norte, 2010 / Construction of bathroom inside north warehouse, 2010
33. Instalación de reja metálica en patio para aislación de mascotas, 2015 / Installation of metal fence in patio for pet isolation, 2015
34. Cambio revestimiento por piso flotante, 2015 / Change to engineering wood floor, 2015
35. Colocación perimetral del puntos de seguridad, 2015 / Placement of perimeter safety fence, 2015
Cosas que no han variado de posición en el tiempo
Cosas existentes
Cosas que ya no están

Luciano Kulczewski, Casa Castañón, Ñuñoa, 1930.
Mutaciones – Ocupación / Mutations – Occupation
Dibujo / Drawing: Simón Morgado
destiny that awaits these houses is trapped in the sphere of the private, their photographs and original plans have the power to crystallize and ensure the transcendence of that fleeting and idyllic initial moment. The consequences are worrisome. The architect is like a father who treasures and proudly shows photographs of his newborn children, but who knows nothing about who they have grown to be or the life they currently live.

What is the point of thinking about a house design as an outcome or final form when its subsequent mutant life becomes evident? Would it be better to migrate towards more receptive design strategies that enable this nature? Evidence of this need is the legitimacy of the so-called ‘Sketch Law’ (Law 20,898) that since the late 1990s offers the possibility of legalizing the huge number of expansions and modifications that affect small houses. Contrary to what could be concluded from such legislation or from the literature available, mutability in domestic architecture is not exclusive of the lowest-income sectors.

It is surprising that the unique traces of a designer such as Kulczewski back down silently to give space to a myriad of requirements that the different dwellers had for this house. Unknown to experts, the Castañón house is definitely not one of the architect’s representative works. Its current form and each of the steps that gave rise to this ‘mutant’ result are representative of the changes affecting its residents, neighborhood, and city. The home was fenced and fortified in response to the importance acquired by security; the need to house several cars favored the construction of a hard courtyard and a new access point; storage spaces increased through the construction of exterior rooms; the second level was expanded to accommodate a call center that worked there for a few years; walls were thrown and the distribution of several rooms changed; a new bathroom was added and all artifacts and furniture in the other bathrooms, as well as the kitchen’s, were renewed; facades were coated, floors, doors, and windows changed, and so on. And life goes on. New alterations (not recorded in these drawings) are being made while these words are written and countless future designs wait for their moment.

The increase in residential, labor, and family mobility, added to shifts in trends and lifestyles, certainly has consequences on living spaces. The house is valued to the extent that it stresses its potential condition: its ability to work as an open project and a tangible expression of individual freedom, in order to welcome the innumerable needs of those who inhabit it.

The acceptance of this mutant condition – though little explored by the architectural discipline – is validated daily by a culture that conceives the house as a space of freedom. Far from the idea of the container for domestic life, the house is a place for
Luciano Kulczewski, Casa Castañón, Ñuñoa, 1930.
Mutaciones – Ocupación / Mutations – Occupation
Detalle / Detail
Dibujo / Drawing: Simón Morgado
Planta nivel 1 / Plan level 1
E. / S. 1:75
Planta nivel 2 / Plan level 2
E. / S. 1:75
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<td>Alfombra (x)</td>
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<td>Silla comedor (y)</td>
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A: Cosas que ya no están
B: Cosas existentes
C: Cosas que han variado de posición en el tiempo

The text discusses the proliferation of augmented reality experiences and their impact on architecture, technology, and material. It highlights the role of architecture in societal changes and the need for new languages and disciplines to keep pace with technological advancements. The text also touches on the role of architecture in shaping domestic spaces and the need to question the nature of architectural projects to involve new participants and disciplines.
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<th>PATIO</th>
<th>(10) RODEGA 1</th>
<th>(11) LOGIA</th>
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